

Reflections on strategy for the Freeze Movement in 1985 and beyond, in preparation for an article for Nuclear Times (Tuesday, June 4, 1985), to be based on my February talk to the Northern California Freeze meeting.

1. Talk with Steve Ladd, Monday, 3 June 1985.

a. It was a mistake in 1980 to include "production" so prominently, or at all, in the definition of the "freeze." That focussed controversy on the issue of verification of production, the weakest point (polemically) of our argument. That lost us the support of some "experts" and arms controllers, who felt sincere unease or skepticism about verifiability of production; and gave others a good excuse to remain aloof or opposed. (Brzezinski: "The freeze is a hoax.") That absence of expert support was very costly, especially when we were confronted by attack by Administration "experts." (That in turn helped limit public response to the Freeze to being a demand for arms negotiations, rather than committed support for this particular proposal.)

(b) It follows that the current proposal for comprehensive Freeze legislation in Congress is a mistake. Not only does it renew the production verifiability debate, but it proposes that **Congress** achieve the conditions of verifiability: an absurdity.

Ladd: "But shouldn't we ask for more than we expect? And isn't this proposal a good device for education of Congresspersons, in lobbying?" No. No. There is such a thing as asking too much, or asking the wrong thing. If we convey to Congresspersons that we have no appreciation at all of what is achievable through Congress, we greatly erode our claim to be listened to seriously and responded to seriously. Our assurances that other aspects of our proposals are feasible, reliable, achievable will be less credible.

Moreover, pressing this demand not only expends part (a large part, I suspect, despite assurances to the contrary) of our lobbying energy, it uses up "clout" uselessly. Someone who wants our support can buy it cheaply and meaninglessly by voting for a comprehensive bill that has no chance of passing (and Reagan won't punish them for this, precisely because the bill is so harmless), rather than by working hard for a "less ambitious" bill that might actually pass and restrain the budget and arms race if enough commitment, risk-taking and effort were devoted to it. We would do better to say, "You get no points at all for pleasing George Sommaripa and the Mass Freeze by voting for this; if you want our thanks and campaign support, you've got to work (and not only vote, though that is, of course, necessary) for this and this."

2. I conclude that public support for the "Freeze" was predominantly support for negotiations and "arms control," not specifically for our Freeze proposal as distinct from other arms control measures as topics for negotiation. In effect, it was not support focussed on "ending the arms race"--which the Freeze would do, and other proposals would not--but, say, on "reducing the risks of nuclear war by talking with the Soviets and

periodically affirming agreements," and on, perhaps, lowering the costs of the arms race, moderating the scale of budget increases and perhaps mutually curtailing certain weapons (not necessarily on the basis of their special danger).

Still less was it focussed on avoiding particular weapons (nearly all those about to be added!) because they were destabilizing, threatening and/or vulnerable counterforce "first strike" weapons that added to our danger by their very existence, and drove the arms race by greatly increasing the likelihood of Soviet imitation and/or countermeasures that further decreased the security of both powers. Public awareness of this problem would be expressed by rejecting such weapons unilaterally, if necessary: as is true for opposition to the MX (inadequate to deny the President 40 to 50 MXs, even in fixed silos, and even in the context of the Trident II program, which is hardly opposed at all though equally dangerous).

3. The comprehensive Freeze is not the only way to "end the arms race" bilaterally; a Freeze on testing and deployment would also do this (without the verifiability problems). (Steve: "Would not both sides pursue production then, and stockpile?" Maybe. But there would be great military reservations about doing so with untested systems; though such efforts could be an incentive to "break out" later from the constraints on testing and deployment. Probably this approach is more suited to a limited-duration moratorium, while negotiating a comprehensive Freeze.)

4. But "ending the arms race" is not the only way to reduce the risks of nuclear war that are associated with the current arms race. Among "arms control" approaches that fall short of ending the production of nuclear weapons entirely, there are at least three distinct alternatives. The Reagan approach (a defeat for Perle, who would prefer not to be talking with the Soviets at all, and a response to our own pressures) is to talk to the Soviets, in terms that preclude any agreement, ever, on anything (at least, any agreement that would limit our "options" to test or build any new weapon at all).

A second, the SALT-II approach (probably favored by Mondale) seeks agreements that moderate the mutual buildup, make it more predictable and perhaps lower the cost. (The belief that this approach puts "ceilings," albeit unduly high ones, on certain classes of weapons is now being put in question by the strong pressures for the US to move above the supposed ceiling on overall MIRVd warheads arising just as soon as the US has finally reached this limit in its planned buildup of Trident). Despite talk by its supporters of their desire to "improve stability" by this approach, it has not, in fact, achieved--or even involved serious official proposals to achieve--the renunciation of any of the new dangerously destabilizing weapons developments (MIRV, accuracy, vulnerable fixed-silo counterforce weapons, unverifiable weapons like cruise missiles, or short time of flight counterforce

weapons like Pershing II or Trident II, on the US side, or SU counterparts. This characterizes Reagan's START proposals, and the various build-down proposals. At best this avoids measures that would further "destabilize the arms race itself" by causing costly counterreactions on both sides (like further Soviet MIRVing of existing missiles).

A third approach, talked about by arms controllers but not yet reflected in official US proposals, would be to seek agreements that really would improve stability, or avert new destabilizing measures. (SALT-I could be said to be an example of this, averting large ABM programs on both sides, though in 1972 a major consideration was to avoid the cost of systems that would almost surely be wholly ineffective, in the face of countermeasures). Examples would be:

- a) ban on ASAT
- b) ban on new MIRVd missiles, land and sea.
- c) elimination of highly accurate MIRVd missiles (currently only on land).
- d) ban on and elimination of long-range cruise missiles, especially sea-based (perhaps not, air-based).
- e) comprehensive ban on testing of warheads.
- f) ban on testing and deployment of SDI systems.

This third approach would not wholly "end arms production" because it would be compatible testing and deploying new single-warhead missiles, either for hardened (or super-hardened) silos or mobile use (and perhaps even protected by non-nuclear ballistic missile defense, i.e., local ground-based defenses, negotiated as modifications to SALT-I). Likewise, new bombers and submarines -- e.g., Trident subs (with Trident I missiles, but not with Trident II missiles) and B-1 or Stealth bombers, with ALCMs, could be permitted. These could be regarded as replacements for existing, relatively stable components of a "triad" of deterrence, such as the Poseidon submarines and missiles, the B-52, and Minuteman II. What would be prohibited would be "modernization" that would reproduce or enhance the destabilizing, counterforce capabilities of advanced Minuteman III or the SS-18; and the latter capabilities would instead be eliminated.

The beauty of the Freeze proposal, as of 1980, was that it would achieve comprehensively the aims of this third approach to arms control (except, immediately, for eliminating advanced Minuteman III and the SS-18). That would still be true today (except for Pershing II and SLCMs, which now need to be withdrawn). It would go further to ban Midgetman or the SS-25, which would be desirable on cost grounds (the US does not need a "triad" including land-based missiles, and in any case has the Minuteman II which could be survivable if the Soviets eliminated their MIRVd missiles). But if that ban is too offensive to the respective US and SU services operating land-based missiles, the objectives of the Freeze could be modified to allow these without increasing the dangers of nuclear war. (The modification does affect the formulation of the Freeze, and the way it has largely

been promoted. But I am urging that the rationale be changed in any case, to focus more sharply on the dangerous, destabilizing character of the weapons that most need to be averted or eliminated.)

6. Steve Ladd points out a real psychological/political problem in campaigning against "first strike weapons." It is hard for Americans to imagine or believe that Ronald Reagan, or any American President, would ever contemplate or undertake a "first strike."

By contrast, the Coalition for Peace Through Strength had no great trouble communicating the "first strike~ nature of new Soviet weapons. It is easy for Americans to believe that the Evil Empire would launch a first strike--even, an attack out of the blue--if they could get away with it, so such capabilities readily appear ominous. But the same capabilities in the hands of an American President do not appear to raise the same dangers at all: even, reasonably, to the Soviets. To be sure, the Coalition and the CPD did propose acquiring the same systems, which they had just characterized as "first strike" (in Soviet hands), but allegedly for quite different purposes than the Soviets'. This program involved a lot of logic-chopping and obscurantism, but its proponents could feel safe that their argument and its implications would not be looked at too closely, precisely because it is so implausible to an American audience that Americans could be even suspected of motives that it is commonplace to attribute to Soviet leaders.

The fact is that "out of the blue," "Pearl Harbor" attacks are not the relevant type of "first strikes~ to consider either for the Soviets or the US. And the "preemptive" and "escalatory" categories of "first strike" that are relevant are both unfamiliar to the public and somewhat complicated to explain. Both of these aspects make it a daunting task either to communicate what one means by "first strike weapons" or to persuade an audience of their dangers to us in a slogan or a 30-second commercial.

The difficulties are real. But as I pointed out to Ladd, the choice by Freeze campaigners has always been to back away from them, and refrain from giving prominence to the problems of "instability" (another word little understood and not easy to define) and "first strike" character posed by new weapons, even when these are mentioned in a list of reasons for the Freeze. Thus we have never really tested whether we could, after all, make these problems understandable and persuasive to the larger public. And in the absence of a real attempt to do this, we have relied on alternative rationales for a Freeze that--while easy to state and to accept--do not convey the sense of urgency and high priority that are appropriate and are (it appears, after November, 1984 and the spring of '85) necessary to sway voters in Presidential elections and in Congress.

7. A first step would be to describe convincingly what the actual Reagan policy is, with respect to the threatened use of nuclear weapons, and hence for his weapons build-up and postural strategy, and his (non-)objectives in negotiations.

But what I learn from the Yankelovich and CPD polls, and from the results in November and in Congress, is that this exposition will be far from enough; because most of the public, without having thought much about it earlier, may at this moment find this policy quite acceptable, in general terms. Indeed, a valid description may turn out to correspond pretty closely to what they have suspected Reagan's policy to be (even though this differs from public official explanations), and also to what they think it should be.

For example: the majority of Americans polled oppose first use of nuclear weapons, even in Europe. But they are for threatening first use, i.e., for bluffing. And they may well believe that this is what our policy in Europe actually is. They could even be right, so far as Presidential intentions, and the intentions of European civilian leaders, go. (I.e., their "mistaken" belief that it is U.S. "policy" never to use nuclear weapons first may refer to what they believe to be "action" policy rather than "declaratory" policy. And they cannot be proven to be mistaken about this; they may even be right, so far as intentions go). More significantly, they find this bluff acceptable, even essential.

if they are actively to reject efforts to enhance the credibility of such "bluffs" --thus, if they are actively to support the Freeze (or even lesser approaches to "stability"), which would preclude such efforts, which are the major part of Reagan's nuclear programs--they must not only be convinced what Reagan's arms strategy and nuclear diplomacy really amounts to. They must further be persuaded that it is dangerous, and that there are better alternatives.

Part of that process would be, I think, informing them of the concrete historical circumstances in which past nuclear threats have actually been made or seriously contemplated; and just how close some of these "hidden nuclear crises" have brought us to nuclear war. This history of "near misses" goes far, I find, to convey to those who accept a policy of nuclear threats "in principle" that this policy has regularly been applied by past Presidents in a way that seems reckless, inappropriate, and ultimately dangerous to most listeners.

Reagan himself, and his officials such as Haig and Weinberger, have made the policy unusually explicit; or at least, they did so in their first two years in office, before the outcry in Europe and at home taught them to watch their language. But whereas Americans seem to have a good deal of tolerance for bluffs by their leaders, this little-known history of past threats

that could easily have moved to US combat use of nuclear weapons--in circumstances when most non-official Americans would have found this grossly unwarranted--reveals a divergence between official and public values, judgements, and risk-taking propensities that, it is easy to imagine, may prevail in the Reagan era as well. That discovery is frightening, and motivating to citizens' action; at least, that was true for me, and, I find, for some of my hearers.

8. A crucial point is that these threats--which ultimately drive the acquisition of the new weapons on the way, in terms of strategic rationale--are not limited to deterring Soviet aggression in West Europe. If they were (as Randy Forsberg often suggests, e.g. in the first issue of the IDDS Newsletter) there would be less chance to mobilize mass sentiment against them, since this particular instance of first-use threats is widely accepted (or acceptable, when people are first made aware of it).

They have mainly been made--and Carter and Reagan have been preparing to make them again--outside Western Europe, in the Third World. They have been made for purposes far less compelling than averting or responding to a Soviet invasion of Europe, far less grave than "preventing an imminent replay of World War II." Their governmental targets have included Third World leaders (such as Ho Chi Minh) far less easy to deter than the cautious leaders of our superpower adversary.

And they have been made, by a succession of Presidents, in circumstances when each of these elected officials felt them to be appropriate, but generally did not care to defend that judgement to the larger public in open debate. The threats and preparations, in other words, were kept secret--from Americans, not from their targets!--and for good reason, from the Presidents' point of view; members of the public generally do not endorse their tactics, in retrospect, even when they were successful, and almost surely would have been horrified and resistant at the time. The implications for democracy and Constitutional government, as well as for human survival, are evident to most hearers.